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The Technology Coach: Implementing Instructional Technology in Kean University's ESL Program



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Abstract: Faculty involved in implementing a grant to incorporate technology into post-secondary ESL teaching and learning describe the coaching model they used to do this. The authors explain how they drew from principles of literacy coaching to develop and implement their model; describe their experiences in working with coachees; discuss technology plans, including instructional software and lessons; and reflect on the successes and challenges experienced by the faculty and students. The profile includes applications for faculty professional development in higher education, with implications that are especially meaningful for programs predominantly staffed by part-time and adjunct faculty.

Academic coaching is based on a long history of teaching and learning through demonstration and shared experience. It involves a partnership between very experienced teachers and somewhat less experienced teachers so that the knowledge and practices of the former are passed on to the latter. The experienced teachers share lesson planning, teaching practices, and technological innovations with their coaching partners, which creates a significant improvement in the less experienced teachers' work with their students. Coaching has taken various forms and has been referred to in a variety of ways—for example: apprenticeships, on-the-job-training, mentoring and internships. The business world has made extensive use of this model (Zeus and Skiffington; Hudson; Porter; Kilburg), and, over the past decade, it has played an increasingly important role in middle schools and high schools, particularly in the area of literacy instruction (Bauman; Hall; Sturtevant). The preferred approach to coaching today is collaborative, collegial, process oriented, and based on observation of and reflection on practice (Buly et al; Shanklin). Full-time coaching positions are devoted to faculty development and teaching methods, and professional educational organizations have developed resources to support this effort. Many coaching resources are available through the websites of these professional organizations, including the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the National Science Teachers Association, and the National Council for the Social Studies.

While coaching has been used in businesses, middle schools, and high schools, it has not been promoted systematically at the post-secondary level. There are reasons for this, including the intensive workload of full-time faculty and the large numbers of adjunct faculty who teach at multiple campuses and therefore have difficulty taking on additional responsibilities. Yet despite these constraints (and, ironically, because of them), we in the ESL Program at Kean University undertook to implement a coaching model that intersected effectively with the realities of the higher education environment, in general, and with the needs of our program, in particular.

The ESL Program at Kean University, which is part of the English Department, has full-time tenure track faculty as well as a majority of part-time faculty. The program serves several hundred English language learners from beginning through advanced English, who are placed there based on their

reading and writing assessments. Full-time ESL Program faculty continually learn new instructional technologies designed to support English language learners, as do some of the part-time faculty, but not all of the latter have the time to devote to fully understanding how to use these technologies. In response, we wrote a successful grant that enabled us to use an academic coaching model in order to mentor part-time faculty in the use of current and new technology in our program, including SMART Board, Citation Online, Focus on Grammar, Pronunciation Power, and Oxford Picture Dictionary (see [Appendix 1 \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx1\]](#) for further description of these technological tools). The experiences of full-time and part-time faculty in response to this model were varied, with many positive outcomes as well as some challenges. All participating faculty benefited from the increase in knowledge of new technologies and a heightened awareness of the curriculum itself, which includes five levels of core six-credit ESL courses, from beginning through advanced English; supplemental 3-credit courses for each of the five levels; and optional L-sections (English language learners sections) for two courses, which are "Research and Technology" and "World Literature" (see [Appendix 2 \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx2\]](#) for a description of the ESL program). Collegial exchange among faculty, the generation of ideas, and a broadened view of the continuity across course levels were significant benefits of the coaching model. The challenges involved the reliable functioning of equipment and software and the amount of time available for part-time faculty to learn technological innovations, issues that will continue to be factors. In what follows, we will explain how we drew on the coaching scholarship to design and implement our technology coaching model; describe our experiences in working with coachees; discuss technology plans, including instructional software and lessons; and reflect on the successes and challenges experienced by the faculty and students.

Coaching in Educational Contexts

Although higher education has its unique parameters, in many areas post-secondary educators can learn a great deal about coaching from the experiences of middle and high school coaches, teachers, and administrators. Research and publications regarding the implementation of coaching programs focus primarily on middle and high schools and provide a valuable basis for the exploration of this model in higher education. As a first step in our attempt to implement a coaching model in our ESL program, we turned to these experiences and to this scholarship for guidance.

A key resource on coaching in educational contexts is a document entitled *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches* that was developed collaboratively by the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the National Science Teachers Association, and the National Council for the Social Studies (2006). [\[1\] \[#note1\]](#) Although the document is focused on the middle and high school levels of education, its insights are very valuable for all levels of education, which is why we explored this resource and applied it to our university setting. It includes standards for leadership and literacy in the language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, and a review of existing research as well as of potentially fruitful areas for future research. The document outlines four essential criteria for coaching programs, all of which are important for our coaching process as well—that they be “grounded in inquiry and reflection; participant-driven and collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among teachers within communities of practice; sustained, ongoing, and intensive; [and] connected to and derived from teachers’ ongoing work with their students” (3). According to the standards put forward by the five collaborating professional organizations, the coaches need to be “skillful collaborators [who can work well with others in school settings], job-embedded coaches [insiders like our ESL Program faculty who can work well and knowledgeably with the teachers they coach], evaluators of literacy needs, [and] instructional strategists” (5).

In Part 3 of the *Standards* document (35-49), Snow, Ippolito, and Schwartz present a "common definition of literacy coaching" (37, 40) that yields a list of "requisite" abilities for successful coaching and a list of "discretionary" abilities. Falling under the areas of guiding, liaising, and qualifications, these abilities proved essential to our coaching program and to our choices of coaches. *Guidance* includes the ability to model effective instruction, engage teachers effectively in individual meetings regarding their teaching, facilitate group meetings, understand and discuss with others the latest research in the area, and help teachers deal with students' learning issues (37). *Liaising* includes bringing together the goals and needs of administrators, teachers, and students in a way that facilitates problem-solving, collaborating on planning at all levels, bringing knowledge of assessment requirements and tools to discussions, and providing feedback to all concerned (37). *Qualifications* include significant knowledge of the area in which the coaching is being done, the ability to lead, the ability to work with adult professionals in the spirit of continuing research and problem-solving, knowledge of the student population, and a proven record of effective teaching (37, 40). While Snow et al. consider these to be essential criteria for an effective coach, they suggest that coaches can also contribute significantly in the areas of grant writing, planning at the school level, advising the administration, liaising between the school and the community, and conducting research (40). They suggest as well that it is important for a coach to be knowledgeable in the content area of the teacher whom s/he is coaching, to be highly proficient in oral and written communication, and to be particularly good in interpersonal communication (40). We developed our ESL faculty coaching program based on these principles. As we explain in greater detail below, the coaches that were assigned were knowledgeable regarding lesson planning (see [Appendix 4 \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx4\]](#)) and technology, and had pre, during, and post teaching sessions that supported the coachees' learning.

Coaching has been explored as a professional development tool for some years (Barron et al.; Vacilotto and Cummings). As such, it is important that coaching be documented and be the subject of reflection. Snow et al. suggest five areas that should be included in the reflection process: "1) participants' reactions, 2) participants' learning, 3) organization [sic] support and change, 4) participants' use of new knowledge and skills, [and] 5) student learning outcomes" (44). Reflection is at the core of the coaching process; it guides, shapes, and brings participants to a deeper understanding of student learning and their own learning. As we implemented coaching in our program, this step became an essential part of the process. Our coaches engaged their coachees not only in planning and co-teaching, but also in meeting afterwards to reflect on the lessons they taught in class using technology.

The institutional environment is another key factor in assuring the success of coaching. Douglas Fisher points out that "it is critical that site and district administrators understand the need for this professional development and that all coaches participate [in helping other teachers develop professionally]" (Fisher 3). The coaches and teachers alone, no matter how committed and well prepared, cannot ensure the success of coaching without institutional support (International Reading Association et al 44-45). This is as true at the university level as it is at the middle and high school levels. Cathleen Cronin Kral, director of Literacy Coaching in the Boston Public Schools, states, "By participating in professional development and coaching sessions with their staff, principals [...] show that everyone needs to keep learning, and they dispel the notion that a single workshop or P[rofessional] D[evelopment] session is enough to learn deeply a new approach to instruction" (2). In middle schools and high schools, coaching is supported through full-time positions so that the process can be continuous and additive. Their full-time status allows coaches to devote the time they need to effectively guide teachers and to liaise with administrators as well.

Unfortunately, a full-time coaching position at the university level is quite rare without funding from a grant, but as our experience came to prove, voluntary coaching by knowledgeable faculty can still

be effective in helping other faculty to learn new technology and teaching practices. Sally Bowman Alden, executive director of the Computer Learning Foundation, notes that one of the most important factors in providing professional development is the availability of "incentives and support" (1). Without this practical foundation, the exchange and demonstration of ideas is constrained. Rita Bean and Diane DeFord state, "Most research on educational innovation indicates that change takes time—as much as four to five years" (5). For this reason, a continuous, concerted effort in terms of time and material support is critical in coaching. This has been recognized for years. As early as 1995, Paul Galbraith and Kris Anstrom, in a National Clearinghouse article on peer coaching, provided an excellent overview of the process and issues inherent in the process, and emphasized that this approach was an ongoing one rather than "one-time workshops with no follow-up" (2). The implication of this is that institutional and financial commitment to coaching is an ongoing need. These were key factors in our development of the coaching model that we implemented. Funding from the grant we received allowed participants to receive payment for the additional time they devoted to this program. However, following the grant period, funds were not available to support coaching, so teachers collaborated with each other by observing their peers' classes and by learning from each other how to incorporate into their classes the new technology that was introduced through this grant.

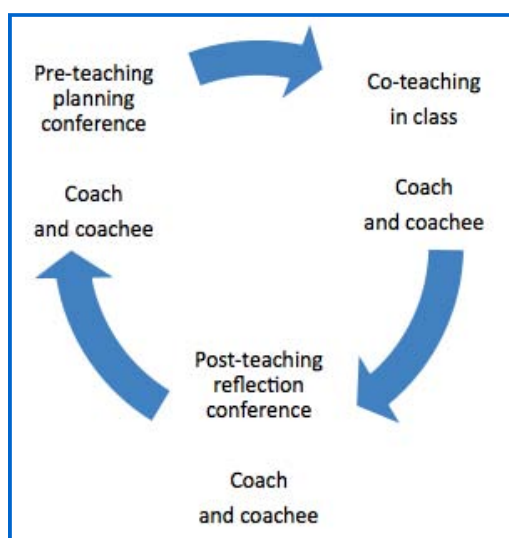
While our ESL Program could not commit resources for a full-time coaching position, we were able to follow the example of other programs, where peer coaching among teachers functions within a wholly collegial model. Important areas of responsibility in such programs include facilitating meetings, demonstrating lessons, conferencing one-on-one with teachers, and delivering coaching school-wide. Jeanne Swafford and her colleagues conducted a year-long qualitative study on peer coaching in an "early literacy" context. They found that the support peer coaching provided had a positive "affective" and "reflective" impact on the teachers who were implementing new ideas. Viewing their teaching from multiple perspectives facilitated their progression toward a more reflective process of thinking about their teaching. This is consistent with the experiences of the Kean University ESL Program coachees, who learned a great deal throughout the coaching process and therefore used more technology in their classes. In the discussion that follows, we will detail and analyze our experiences in experimenting with coaching as a professional development tool.

The ELMS Grant and its Coaching Component

The coaching approach to professional development in our program grew out of an Education for Language Minority Students (ELMS) Grant funded by the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education. The immediate purpose of the grant was to make current technology and software available to our students and faculty (del Puerto and Gamboa; Dolle and Enjelvin; Egbert et al; Garret; Wang) so that our students would benefit in learning English quickly and effectively from the new and expanded content of the resources for teaching and learning. Specialized equipment and software were purchased for the two existing ESL computer labs at Kean University, including a Smart Board™, Citation 9 note taking and bibliography software, Pronunciation Power, Focus on Grammar Levels 1-4, and Oxford Picture Dictionary (see [Appendix 1 \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx1\]](http://compositionforum.com/issue/24/kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx1) for more details on each of these learning and teaching tools). The use of wikis and blogs were other aspects of the grant participants' exploration of technological tools for teaching. Use of these new technologies was valuable to the faculty and students in our ESL Program because it allowed significant support of students' learning of English, both individually and in the context of a class session, including grammar, pronunciation, citation, vocabulary (through images in the Oxford Picture Dictionary software), and many language learning tools by using SMART Board. These tools greatly expanded students' opportunities to improve their English through their individual work with all levels of the technology. The tools also supported the faculty's teaching of English to their students in class and provided an opportunity for students to significantly improve their English.

A critical part of the grant was to provide opportunities for our ESL Program faculty to explore and become more comfortable with using these tools. Orientation sessions that are focused on equipment and software use often have a limited impact. Those faculty who have a particular interest in and facility with technology make the leap from the general orientation to a more in-depth examination into and effective use of its potential. Many faculty, though interested in and eager to use technology, become bogged down in figuring it out, often setting it aside for lack of time to work through it themselves. This can be particularly true for part-time faculty.

To address these realities, we chose a coaching model of professional development that allowed each faculty member to have his/her own specific concerns and questions addressed. As we described above, there are many ways to construct a coaching model (Snow, Ippolito, and Schwartz); in our setting, we decided to begin with coach-coachee pairings in which the coach had experience with the technological tool(s) being explored and the coachee had only some or no experience of those tools. A coaching cycle, as illustrated in the following figure, was designed to consist of pre-teaching conferencing, co-teaching, and post-teaching conferencing.



[\[kean-coach-process-large.png\]](#) **Figure 1:** The Coaching

Process. [View larger image. \[kean-coach-process-large.png\]](#)

This cycle was completely divorced from any evaluative process, so both coach and coachee felt comfortable exploring ideas freely and without feeling self-conscious about their prior knowledge or experience with the tool(s). The leadership of the experienced coaches during the coaching cycles ensured that the curricular goals of the courses in question were front and center in the discussions, while the technicalities of learning to use the tools were a part of the process.

Implementing the Coaching Component

Implementation Structure

Four of the five of us, with diverse, experienced backgrounds, served as coaches for the project, offering balanced perspectives for the implementation of the funded project. Dr. Linda Best is a former director of the ESL Program and current chair of the English Department, possessing a thorough and in-depth knowledge of the curriculum plus the ability to develop a conceptual framework, especially for integrating technology into instruction. Sharon Kettyle, who had worked at Bell Labs, was familiar with technology and had already been using technology in her ESL classes. Dr. Ruth P. Griffith was also familiar with technology and had tremendous abilities in materials development. Dr. Charles Nelson has been teaching ESL writing for 14 years and had begun

exploring the use of weblogs and wikis in the classroom a year before the grant began. ESL Program Director Dr. Sharon C. Snyder, who conceptualized and wrote the grant, facilitated the coaching team's work as Project Director. She brought significant experience in participative professional development to the table. In addition, graduate assistants and lab assistants assisted both the project team and ESL faculty with the project's technology concepts.

To implement our coaching model for technology support, members of the coaching team met weekly during the academic year from September 2005 through May 2007 and used the coaching strategies from the articles discussed in the "Coaching in Educational Contexts" section above. These collaborative strategies proved essential for successful coaching. In these meetings, we established a framework of implementation guidelines, core principles, workshops, and our wiki. The wiki was a crucial tool in that it allowed us to communicate between meetings—to share ideas and materials or to discuss coaching experiences, for example. It held all of our documents, such as minutes, principles, coaching schedule, and so on. Tagged with labels and indexed alphabetically and chronologically, the documents were easily searchable and retrievable. By having all documents available at all times, we could review, revise, and edit any document, and have a history of the changes being made.

In addition, we developed a critical tool for project implementation: a lesson plan format (see [Appendix 3 \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx3\]](#)) designed for immediate use and eventual storage in an electronic directory of program lesson plans. This tool kept our focus on the curriculum as we introduced and incorporated technology into instruction. It included lesson objectives, goals/outcomes, assessment criteria, and course objectives. Together, these elements served as the basis for all decisions about technology in the classroom. The lesson plan also included sections for comments/reflections about a lesson as well as follow up lessons and activities. (See [Appendix 4 \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx4\]](#) for examples of completed lesson planning, using this format.)

In conceptualizing an overarching framework that would focus on program objectives and guide our implementation of technology, the cornerstone was a set of Core Principles that covered learning, teaching, and assessment from individual and program perspectives. These principles included the following:

1. An ecology of interacting people, tools, and historical precedent and experience provides the context in which teaching, learning, and program operations take place.
2. Goals, whether conscious or unconscious, drive teaching, learning, and program activity.
3. Change is the essence of learning.
4. Multifaceted assessment effectively measures teaching and learning.

Our preparation for the coaching cycles included surveys and three workshops, so that the faculty's familiarity with coaching, interaction with students, and knowledge of technology would be known by the assigned coaches, and so that the ensuing coaching sessions could be planned according to the coachees' needs and current knowledge related to effective teaching—as recommended by the scholarship on coaching. The surveys were administered to program faculty and students to measure familiarity with, dispositions towards, and access to technology, such as Microsoft Office tools, email, library databases, blogs, podcasts, and so on. The three workshops included a two-day workshop on using Smart Board™ conducted by a certified trainer and two workshops conducted by the coaching team. In the last two workshops, the coaching team shared an overview of the grant, its goals, the coaching model, and our perspective on projects, lesson plans, activities, and the technology. In the last workshop, we used the Smart Board™ to showcase how it could support teaching. These

workshops framed the coaching experience in two key ways: (1) They established the Smart Board™ as the centerpiece of our technology, and (2) they placed coaching and technology within the program's curricular goals and vision for teaching and learning. To that end, the lesson plan format was introduced, and faculty were reminded that the goal was to use technology to meet curricular goals as established in the course objectives.

Following the preparatory surveys and workshops, the four member coaching team began the coaching cycles with the 15 part-time faculty members. Participation in coaching was a requirement of the adjuncts' Fall 2006 contract, and the time they spent in the pre- (planning) and post conferences during the coaching cycles was remunerated by funds from the grant. As discussed in the review of the literature, institutional support is critical to such endeavors, and the grant that funded this project is what made our work possible.

The coaching model consisted of two coaching cycles for each ESL faculty member. The first cycle was conducted from the beginning of the Fall semester until midterm of the same semester. The second cycle ran after midterm until the end of the Fall semester. Each cycle consisted of three sessions: the planning session, the co-teaching session, and the post-teaching conference. During the planning session, the coach and faculty member discussed the curricular objectives to be met during the co-teaching session. In other words, the discussion did not begin with the question of which technology would be "taught," but rather, which of the curricular goals would be addressed. Then, together, the coach and faculty member considered available software and how it might aid in the lesson plan. The coach and faculty member prepared the lesson and wrote out the goals by following the lesson-plan format designed by the team. The co-teaching session, an innovative element in our coaching model, generally occurred within a week of the planning session. During this time, the coach and faculty member taught a class together. After the co-teaching session, the coach and faculty member met one more time to discuss the effectiveness of the lesson plan and to consider ways to improve it. Collaboration and reflection among coaches and coachees throughout the cycles were important aspects of the experience. Both are central to the coaching process, as noted in the literature.

The coaches kept a detailed record of their time spent coaching and the learning objectives and technology used in each session. On average, each coach spent a total of 22 hours in coaching for the two cycles. This time did not include the preparation that went into developing Smart Board™ pages or practice using the technology for the classroom presentation.

Methods of Implementation

Overall, the first coaching cycle of three sessions proved more challenging than the second cycle. This experience supported published findings that repeated coaching cycles are a productive means to incremental growth. In the first cycle, the coaches and faculty members spent 25% more time on the planning than they did in the second cycle (71 minutes in the first cycle as contrasted to 53 minutes in the second cycle). In both the first and the second cycles, the pairs met longer for the planning sessions (average of 60 minutes each) than they did for the post conference (average of 45 minutes each). Co-teaching took various forms, and what happened in the classroom was determined by the faculty member. In some cases, the classroom teacher asked the coach to assist with the technology. In other classes, the coach was asked to introduce the lesson. For example, in one session using Pronunciation Power, the coach was asked to introduce the difference between the phonemes /s/ and /z / and to show how the difference could be observed in Pronunciation Power. After that introduction, the classroom teacher continued the lesson, directing the students to identify and to practice the phonemes in various phonemic environments.

The range of software and hardware used in coaching varied as well. Here, again, collaboration, as recommended by coaching professionals, was central to the success of our project. Often, additional time was needed in the lab to practice on the Smart Board™ or to use the software that had been installed in the ESL computer labs. Unfortunately, since the computers in the coaches' offices were antiquated and unable to run the new software, the lesson designs often had to be developed in the computer lab, which was heavily used for classes, or in the adjunct faculty room, where one computer was equipped with all the new software.

In retrospect, three trends were evident in the coaching, all of which were the result of careful planning and emerging insights throughout the coaching process. In the high intermediate and advanced core levels, the co-teaching learning objectives revolved around critical thinking skills such as "argument as conversation" or "essay cohesiveness." In the supplemental courses for these levels, the curricular focus most often reflected the support needed to be better academic writers, such as "creating a bibliography." In the beginning and low intermediate levels, the faculty asked that the co-teaching sessions be based on the curricular goals of supplemental skills—grammar and pronunciation. In these sections, Focus on Grammar and Pronunciation Power were used to build up the microskills of grammar and phonemic awareness, that is, to form grammatically correct sentences and to develop pronunciation patterns that approximate the range of standard spoken English. In providing this exposure to the software in the labs, the coaching teams hoped the students would identify the materials and methods that would help them to become independent learners and to continue developing accuracy in grammar and pronunciation on their own time during free labs.

Implementation Issues

As we approached the first coaching cycle, a major issue arose: matching coaches to coachees. Information about our coachees—their understanding of the program's objectives, the courses they taught, their level of experience with technology and desire to use it—was critical to this assignment process. Some were ready to be immersed; others needed direction and support. To proceed, we gathered data through surveys about our coachees, pairing them with coaches who would best meet their needs, and about ourselves as well, identifying our areas of expertise, the ways in which we used technology effectively, and the applications with which we felt most comfortable and proficient.

The process of pairing coaches and coachees led to an important question: Should coaches remain with the same coachees in the second cycle, or should coachees shift to a different coach? Both approaches had advantages. Clearly, some coachees had a continuing relationship with a coach. Re-pairing, though, would provide for more ideas and interactions. We eventually decided on mixing it up as the norm, allowing for an exception if someone requested the same coach.

Another implementation issue focused on how to make pre-coaching planning sessions productive. To address concerns, we established the following protocol. First, our colleagues received an email from the program director announcing the upcoming coaching cycles and including attachments, such as the lesson plan format (see [Appendix 3 \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx3\]](http://compositionforum.com/issue/24/kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx3)). We, the coaches, followed up on this announcement by initiating individual email exchanges with each of our coachees to complete a readiness inventory. Specifically, each of us highlighted our strong points, shared some ideas, and asked brief questions about coachees' interests, the technologies with which they had already experimented, their questions about technology, their perceptions about being coached, and what they might want to teach during the co-teaching coaching experience.

We responded to our coachees' proposed lessons, referencing helpful sites, probing when their ideas were vague, suggesting appropriate technologies, encouraging them to use the lesson plan, and sharing ideas. Our goal was to get them to prepare for their planning session with us. Of course, some

colleagues would not be prepared, and we would have to take the lead to move them forward for a productive coaching experience. Consistently, we found the lesson plan useful as a template for getting ideas down and for staying close to the curriculum (see Appendices 3 and 4). It was also helpful in the post-coaching conference as a tool for review, evaluation, and a lead-in to the second coaching cycle.

As we conducted the two coaching cycles, each of which covered one term and one course per coachee, we worked collegially with our coachees, eliminating any possible perception on their part of the experience having an evaluative purpose. We established our roles as in a co-teaching, co-learning session. At all times, we remained flexible, and we supported our coachees' interests, carrying out a collaborative endeavor, including the co-teaching session, during which both of us would be teaching or in some way participating in the lesson. For example, a coach and coachee planned together and co-taught a class in using Smart Board effectively. This allowed the coachee to learn how to use Smart Board throughout the pre-class and in-class process. The students in class also learned how to use Smart Board through the coach's and coachee's demonstration of that technology.

Implementation Constraints

Schedules presented the greatest constraint in this project. Our ideal plan was to pair coaches and coachees according to needs and interests, but to minimize wasted time, coaches and coachees were matched as much as possible on the basis of schedules that were on the same day, close to the same time (e.g., morning, afternoon, or evening), but not at the same time as our own classes.

The technological tools themselves presented additional constraints. The tools available might not be of use or interest to every coachee. Pronunciation Power helps many students understand the formation of sounds through internal and external images of the mouth, and through aural sounds and sound frequency images (see [Appendix 1 \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx1\]](#)). However, Pronunciation Power would generally be less useful to instructors of advanced levels of writing. Other tools, such as weblogs and wikis, would be more difficult to introduce later in the semester. (During this one-year project, the first round of coaching began right after the first third of the semester.) Students need time to acclimate to tools like these and to use them effectively for learning. Instructors also need to understand these tools well enough to integrate them meaningfully into the course rather than treat them as an add-on at some point in the middle or toward the end of a semester.

One tool was especially difficult to bring into play: Citation 9. This bibliographic and notetaking tool was of great interest to us; we wanted to give students a research and study tool that would allow them to organize and search their notes, tie notes to their sources, and move past haphazard study and research habits toward effective academic strategies and skills. We had envisioned a novel use for the tool: It would be used not only for research in support of one's essays but also in support of one's own writing. Students would use its notetaking capability as a tool of reflection—to take notes on their writing and as documentation for a reflective analysis of their writing at the end of the semester.

A variety of problems worked against our goals, though. In one computer lab, the tool was not installed correctly, and instructors were not able to demonstrate all of its possible uses easily. Some students had trouble installing the application on their computers at home. As the application was only available on computers in two labs on campus, not having it at home prevented students from using it regularly and becoming comfortable with it. Moreover, the tool itself was apparently rather complex as students seemed to have difficulty using it even after being instructed in its use during class. Such obstacles in using Citation deterred most coachees from wanting to be coached on it. This is evidence of the bilateral nature of coaching, in which coachees also can influence the coaching process by

confirming that the use of this difficult technology is not something that should be further explored. As a result, Citation was not pursued by many faculty in class or for their own academic work.

Along similar lines, even the Smart Board (see [Appendix 1 \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx1\]](#)), our centerpiece technology, suffered some setbacks. Although it has excellent abilities that allow faculty and students to draw, write, type on an on-screen keyboard, save by touching the screen, and access many resources, such as pictures and instructional resources, there can be technical problems that occur sometimes. On more than several occasions, it lost its touch sensitivity. Different approaches were tried in restoring that function, but it took most of the semester to figure out a restoration technique. Preparing an entire lesson on the Smart Board™ and not being able to use it discouraged some coaches and coachees from wanting to use it. Fortunately, coaches and coachees had back-up plans so that, if there was a problem with the Smart Board, the lesson would still proceed without using that technology.

Implementing the coaching model was rewarding and challenging, from creating its structure through resolving issues and constraints that arose during its implementation. The foundational structure of the coaching effort was based on the significant background study of technological innovations on the part of the coaching team, along with collaboratively identified principles, workshops that introduced the work ahead, a template for lesson planning, and communication strategies that allowed us to move ahead in consonance. This foundation allowed us to address key issues and constraints as they arose, from effectively matching coaches with coachees based on knowledge and interests, to approaching coaching as collaboration rather than evaluation, to communicating effectively, to resolving scheduling and technological issues. Structure and implementation were inextricably intertwined and essential to the success of the project.

Challenges and Successes: Summary Points About the Coaching Experience

From the perspective of the coaches, the coaching was very intensive on several levels. First, as confirmed by the literature, coaches needed to have a corpus of suggestions available for the coachees who might be reluctant to attempt a lesson using the new technology. Second, they also needed to be flexible enough to accommodate the schedules of the part-time faculty. Since the pre- and post-sessions generally revolved around the part-time faculty's schedule, the coaches often came on days or at times they were not usually on campus.

However irregular the schedule may have been for the coaches, the benefits outweighed the discomfort. The exchange of ideas between coach and coachee was constructive for both. While the coachee learned to use new technology, the coach was able to see the range of material explored at the various ESL levels. This helped the ELMS team see the continuity between levels and the progression of technology usage from one level to the next. Moreover, the interaction between coach and coachee resulted in an explosion of new ideas and established a collegiality between them that in some cases continued beyond the official coaching sessions. Our experience confirmed the significant benefits of collaboration noted by coaching experts. The coaching process created and greatly supported the continuing interaction among faculty and expanded the quality of their teaching. Many coaches and coachees who were not very familiar with each other before the coaching process became partners and friends in the teaching environment, which helped support the ESL Program's cohesion and knowledge sharing, as well as supporting the effective teaching of the ESL Program's students.

The coachees also found the coaching cycles rewarding, as indicated by the pre- and post-surveys. Their comments indicate they appreciated the expertise of the coaches and the assistance during the planning and teaching sessions. As the part-time faculty extended their own expertise in the software

and hardware, they came to the second cycle with more ideas on how to use the technology to enhance their learning objectives. This finding confirmed published claims that learning and reflection build on one another to promote professional development. One coachee observed, "Now that I have used it in class a number of times, I am better able to know what questions to ask and learn new applications for use in the classroom." Another coachee observed that the coaching cycle "forced me to re-evaluate my teaching practices and in little ways to improve them." The teachers worked together to create lessons to meet the needs of the students and to apply new strategies.

The post-survey indicated that the faculty's comfort with and use of technology were increasing. They found technology to be an asset to teaching and learning. This comfort, however, did not include the use of wikis and blogs in the classroom. This is not surprising since none of the learning objectives in the 30 coaching experiences focused on wikis or blogs. Even though blogging was introduced as a communication and publishing tool, none of the faculty chose to use it during their coaching cycles. However, the post-survey also indicated that learning to use blogs and/or wikis is high on the priority list of many. Although they are currently used by some faculty and students, blogs and wikis are not required as part of the ESL Program learning goals.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the coaching sessions was an observation a coachee made in the post-survey, stating, "The curricular goals have been put in better perspective." Reflection, as noted in the literature, is an important aspect of coaching; it builds a deeper understanding of all aspects of the instructional scenario. By reviewing the curriculum during the planning sessions, the instructors were able to renew their knowledge of the curriculum and the objectives for their ESL classes. This process was especially useful for the adjunct faculty members who teach at various institutions where levels and program goals are not equivalent to those at Kean University.

As helpful as the coaching cycles were, they did present some difficulties for the coachees on both a technical level and a personal level. On the technical level, one coachee commented that learning to use the technology was not meaningful when the technology was not available in all the labs or classrooms. In addition, the lab equipment often malfunctioned, even after extensive preparation and practice, leading one coachee to lament, "I am ... disappointed that we had such trouble with the technology. I'm not likely to spend time preparing materials that I won't be able to use because of technical difficulties." For example, hardware would occasionally malfunction, and maintenance and troubleshooting were not always timely. In fact, troubleshooting became a challenge on two levels. First, the ESL program does not have a technology specialist for infrastructure support of its two labs, so when hardware malfunctioned, the instructors had to get assistance from the university's understaffed technology center. Secondly, software problems were difficult for faculty to resolve since lab assistants (student workers) were not always trained on the new technology. The greatest challenge for the future is to maintain both the equipment and the training so that there would be no atrophy in the use of technology, but rather that faculty gains in technology will continue to grow.

On a more personal level, several coachees indicated that, on their own, they would not have enough time to devote to learning the more complex software or the various features of the Smart Board™. One coachee felt there had not been enough one-on-one training, while another reported, "I can use the technology with a co-teacher, but I don't think I am comfortable with it on my own." This indicates that despite coaching, a few faculty members are still reluctant to use the technology on their own. As the post-survey indicates, 77% of the coachees continued to use the Smart Board™ after the coaching cycle, but 15% (2 faculty members) did not use it at all outside their coaching sessions.

As a whole, the faculty indicated a high interest in continuing to learn the new technologies. In the surveys, they requested additional workshops on using the equipment and software in the labs. They also requested peer coaching for integrating technology into instruction and language learning. The

challenge for the ESL program remains to help part-time faculty find the time to learn more and to become more adept with the technology, integrating it into the program's curricular goals. An additional challenge for the full-time faculty members is to be available when the adjuncts ask for assistance with the new technology. Finding the time to work together is often difficult for the full-time faculty member, who, without grant support, does not have the release time that afforded some flexibility into the coaches' schedules. But continued professional development is essential, as observed by both the coaches and coachees, and it is highly desirable for peer coaching to continue.

Continuation of the coaching model could play out in a number of ways, all requiring a financial commitment to fund adjunct faculty professional development on the part of the institution and a time commitment on the part of both full-time and part-time faculty. Future coaching may be most effective when it is driven by those who want to explore ideas, i.e., the coachees. For example, a coachee might initiate contact with a coach for a specific purpose, or any two faculty might decide to team up and explore an innovation or problem area together. The advantage of this is that all involved are seriously committed to the undertaking of exploring ideas and technology. While the institutional budgeting limitations are an ever present factor, this can be mitigated by creating a time and budget framework for all coaching cycles, each of which includes planning, implementation, and reflection. All faculty will be aware of this framework and will know that, even though they devote more time to a particular cycle, they will be compensated according to the set framework. Time and availability will always be factors for faculty, but a clear and predictable framework for engaging in collegial learning will increase the likelihood of participation.

Our goal, and the goal of many institutions of higher education, is to engage faculty in meaningful and effective professional development. We believe that variations of coaching may be fruitful models through which to accomplish this systematically and/or case by case. We look forward to an increased interest in this area in higher education, both in terms of research and application. Examining the effectiveness of various coaching scenarios and sharing their outcomes across higher education institutions may create a highly effective means of promoting collegial exchange and instructional effectiveness.

Appendices

Because of their length, appendices are available on a [separate web page \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php\]](#) (see links below) and [as a PDF document. \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.pdf\]](#)

1. [Appendix 1: Technological Tools: SMART Board, Citation Online, Focus on Grammar, Pronunciation Power, Oxford Picture Dictionary \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx1\]](#)
2. [Appendix 2: Kean University English Department/ESL Program Course Offerings \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx2\]](#)
3. [Appendix 3: Lesson Plan Template \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx3\]](#)
4. [Appendix 4: Sample Lesson Plans \[kean-tech-coach-appendices.php#appx4\]](#)

Notes

1. A brief overview of the qualifications and roles for coaches can be found in publications by the International Reading Association (*The Role*), and the Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse (Frost and Bean). ([Return to text. \[#note1-ref\]](#))

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